

BETO O'ROURKE  
16TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

**Congress of the United States**  
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**Washington, DC 20515**

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June 30, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I write to you to express my appreciation for your hard work to help preserve the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico and to ask for your assistance in permanently protecting the Castner Range area in El Paso, Texas.

The new Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is just north of El Paso and my Congressional District. Many El Pasoans, including my family, visit the area and the local community, including the Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur tribe and the El Paso City Council, strongly supported permanent protection for the area and its unique natural and historic features. The National Monument designation will not only protect our nation's resources, but also bring jobs and economic development to the region.

The Franklin Mountains State Park (FMSP) and Castner Range in El Paso share similar historic, archeological and natural features with the Organ Mountains. The state park was created in 1979 to protect El Paso's mountain range from future urban development. The park spans approximately 37 square miles and is the largest urban park in the United States. It is a mecca for hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, or riding on the Wyler Aerial Tramway. It also protects important habitats, natural springs and historic sites.

Castner Range is adjacent to the FMSP and was once used as an artillery range for Fort Bliss. It is still owned by the Department of Defense and covers over 7,000 acres of land and is one of the largest unprotected open spaces in El Paso. Permanently protecting Castner Range from development is my number one environmental priority. Local conservation organizations, such as the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition and Frontera Alliance, and the El Paso City Council support permanently preserving Castner Range to augment the Franklin Mountains State Park and provide our growing city with additional open space.

There are numerous obstacles that must be overcome in order to protect Castner Range. Although the Army has declared the land to be surplus, the Department of Defense must complete a remedial investigation and account for any remaining unexploded ordnance prior to

transferring the land to an agency, such as the Department of the Interior, which can permanently preserve it.

As your agency looks for other unique cultural, historical and natural areas for preservation, I hope you will consider working with me, the Department of Defense and the El Paso community to conserve Castner Range and ensure that future generations will have access to this beautiful part of the Franklin Mountains. I invite you and your staff to visit El Paso and see Castner Range, the Franklin Mountains State Park and the Chamizal National Memorial. Please contact Diem Ha on my staff with any questions at (202) 225-4831 or [diem.ha@mail.house.gov](mailto:diem.ha@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beto O'Rourke." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Beto O'Rourke  
Member of Congress